DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 996 CS 010 508

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TITLE The Effects of the Media on Parents and Teachers and Reading Aloud to Children.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 49p.; M.A. Thesis, Kean College.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Mass Media Effects; *Parent Attitudes; Periodicals; Portuguese Americans; Preschool Education; Private Schools; Questionnaires; *Reading Aloud to Others; Reading Research; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; Television
IDENTIFIERS Family Literacy

ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether the much publicized campaign geared to parents and teachers about reading aloud to children has had any impact on the U.S. public. Subjects, 236 parents and 17 teachers from an urban private school with a large Portuguese population, filled out questionnaires. Results indicated that parents have been influenced by the media about the importance of reading aloud to their children. Television and magazine articles in particular have helped change the attitudes of a substantial number of parents participating in the research. Results also indicated that most of the teachers in the study were persuaded during college about the positive effects of reading aloud to students, and thus the media would appear not to have had any influence on the teachers. (Twenty-two references and two appendixes containing the questionnaires are attached.) (Author/SR)

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The Effects of the Media on Parents and Teachers and Reading Aloud to Children

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree
Kean College of New Jersey

May 1991

CS010508

Completed 4/20/91

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if the much publicized campaign geared to parents and teachers about reading aloud to children has had any impact on the American public.

Parents and teachers from an urban, private school with a large Portuguese population were given questionnaires to fill out anonymously. The questionnaires were returned and hand tabulated to determine the results. It was determined that parents have been influenced by the media about the importance of reading aloud to their children. Television and magazine articles in particular have helped changed the attitudes of a substantial number of parents who participated in the research. Results also indicated that most of the teachers who participated in this study were persuaded during college about the positive effects of reading aloud to students. The media, in this case being television or non-academic magazines, would appear not to have had any effect or influence on the teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to four special people in my life for their support while I was writing this thesis. First I would like to thank my son Dante for his patience and understanding. Secondly I would like to thank Grace Albano for her help in preparing the questionnaires. A third note of thanks goes to my brother Cosmo Lorusso for the use of his computer. And I also wish to thank Kelly Higgins for all her help in distributing and collecting the questionnaires.

Also, thank you to Dr. Mazurkiewicz for his assistance throughout this project.

There is substantial evidence that reading aloud to children enhances reading readiness. Reading aloud to children from as young as one year of age will increase their vocabularies, improve their listening skills, and their ability to comprehend.

The media has brought these facts into our homes and schools, and yet it would appear that many parents do not take this advice seriously. In the schools, very few teachers seem to be taking fifteen minutes per day to read aloud to their classes.

Many reading specialists are well aware of the research that has been done concerning the positive effects of achievement and parental involvement in the reading process. Parents play a crucial role in children's early reading. Teachers need to remind all parents that their children are ready for informal learning experiences at birth, the environment must be set for learning to take place, and their role is an active one in early reading (Wahl, 1988).

Reading aloud has been whole-heartedly endorsed by the Commission on Reading as seen in Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985), as well as by many other noted researchers. Reading aloud has been shown to be the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Trelease, 1989).

In two research studies, Durkin found that having been read to regularly by their parents was one factor all early readers appeared to have in common (Michener, 1988).

As long as research demonstrates reading aloud to be a critical factor in the creation of a nation of readers, it is incumbant upon educators to ensure its success by convincing their business partners (parents) of its importance. We can accomplish this in two ways: (a) by selling its importance to tomorrow's parents who are sitting in today's classrooms; (b) by showing today's parents how simple and important reading aloud can be in promoting their children's literacy abilities (Trelease, 1989).

It is very difficult to convince parents just how important reading aloud is to the future of their children Today, according to the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, children 6-14 years old control an estimated 6 billion dollars in discretionary income a year (N.Y. Times, 1990). Reading aloud costs virtually nothing if a public library is the sole source for reading material. Yet many of these same parents cannot be convinced of the importance of just fifteen minutes per day in a close, warm, bonding situation with their children.

Classroom teachers must also be convinced of the legitimacy of reading aloud to students. While daily practice of reading aloud is on the rise, it is far from universal among elementary and high school teachers. In one study, conducted by Lapointe, only half the fourth grade teachers estimated they read aloud regularly (Trelease, 1989).

In order for reading aloud to be universally accepted by educators, teachers must be firmly convinced of it's legitimacy and be able to defend it to skeptical parents, supervisors,

and administrators (Trelease, 1989). Classic studies by such researchers as Chomsky, Cohen, and Durkin show that reading aloud to children of preschool and elementary age improves vocabulary, comprehension, syntax, and it fosters a richness of language unavailable otherwise (Butler, 1980).

Chomsky (1972) found that children at higher literacy levels had been read more books at higher complexity levels.

Stallings endorses reading aloud by both teachers and students in secondary remedial classrooms. At the time of her 1979 study, "reading aloud was occurring in relatively few secondary classrooms, but where it was occurring it was associated with student gain" (Butler, 1980).

Hearing good books read aloud by an enthusiastic teacher is an important motivating factor in helping children become readers (Huck, 1979).

Vail indicates that a poor reader derives personal, cultural, and academic benefits from being read to in the classroom. She finds that children who have not been read to will often miss obvious context clues because they lack a feel for the flow of the larger picture. This lack also inhibits appreciation because it results in word by word reading. She suggests that a child can catch language by being read to (Butler, 1980).

Reading aloud to students improves listening skills. Weidner found that reading aloud to students for ten minutes a day, 5 times per week, produced significant increases on 5 of 6 listening skill and reading achievement measures for fourth

graders (Michener, 1988).

With all of this data at our fingertips, we still do not know if the television commercials, magazine articles and posters that promote reading aloud to children have had any appreciable effect upon parents and teachers in the classroom. Such research can help determine why parents and teachers alike refuse to invest a few minutes of quality time in reading aloud to their children so that a life-long love of books and reading can be nurtured.

Hypothesis

To provide information on that topic, the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that the television commercials, magazine articles and posters that promote reading aloud to children have not had any appreciable effect upon parents, and little effect upon teachers in the classroom.

Procedures

The participating parents used for this study were the parents of students, grades Pre-K through grade eight in an urban, private school. The majority of the parents are of medium social economic status, as stated by the principal. Many of the parents surveyed did not have a formal education beyond the high school level. This information was obtained from the school secretary. At least 90% of the parents used English as a second language, the dominant language in the school being Portuguese. Many of the children who entered school spoke little or no English at all.

All of the families in the school were given the survey form to be filled out to the best of their knowledge,

anonymously. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey accompanied the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 236 completed and returned questionnaires, out of the 366 surveys distributed to the families. The survey questions (Appendix A) focused on details such as if the parents ever read aloud to their children, how often, had anything influenced them to read aloud to their children, and had they ever seen commercials or read articles on the importance of reading aloud to their children.

Teachers from this same school were also asked to answer a survey form. This sample included 17 teachers who completed the questionnaire. The teachers were asked to fill out the questionnaire (Appendix B) without discussing it with other teachers. The teacher survey questions focused on such details as the grade level they taught, if they read aloud to their students, how often, what factors influenced them to read aloud. and had the media had any effect on their decision to read aloud to their classes.

Results

The study resulted in 236 parent questionnaires being returned. Out of these, 208 parents indicated they did read aloud to their children.

Question #7 on the questionnaire asked "Have you seen commercials or read articles on the importance of reading aloud to children?" The following results include all parents who completed the questionnaire, including those parents who do

not read aloud to their children: 181 responded that YES, they had seen some type of commercial or article, and 55 responded NO, they had not seen any commercial or article about reading aloud to children

The parents who did read aloud to their children were then asked how often, and the results were:

A. Once a week-41

B. Once a month-8

C. Occasionally-103

D. Every day-56

Parents were then asked "How old was your child when you began to read to him/her?" The results were:

A. In utero-3

B. 0-1 years old-13

C. 1-2 years-32

D. 2-3 years- 55

E. 3-4 years-35

F. 4-5 years-57

G. Older-22

Question #8 asked what type of advertising they had seen about reading aloud and there could have been more than one response to this question. The results were:

A. Television-123

B. Magazine articles-93

C. Newspaper articles-42

D. Literature sent home from the school-79

Question #9, which could also have multiple responses asked, "Did the advertising you saw:"

A. cause you to begin reading to your children? 38 parents responded yes.

B. confirm your views about reading to children? 111 parents responded yes.

C. make you feel guilty that you had not read to your children? 21 responded yes.

D. have no effect on the amount of time spent reading to your children? 26 responded yes.

E. encourage you to share your reading with your children? 26 responded yes.

F. encourage you to get a library card? 22 responded yes.

G. encourage you to attend a library reading class? 7 responded yes.

All of the parents were asked if they enjoyed reading. The results indicated that 209 did enjoy reading, 18 did not, and 3 said that they enjoyed it sometimes.

Question #11 asked if their children ever see adults in the house reading:

A. Once a week-25

B. Once every two weeks-1

C. Once a month-3

D. Occasionally-69

E. Every day-95

F. Never-8

The majority of all the parents, including those who did not read to their children thought that reading was important. 221 parents responded that it was important, 7 said it was not important, and 8 had no opinion.

The last question on the questionnaire asked the parents at what age they would stop reading aloud to their children. This question was answered only by those parents who did read aloud to their children. The results of this question were:

A. Never-34

B. When they learn how to read-51

C. 7 or 8 years old-11

D. 9 or 10 years old-38

E. Teenager-24

F. When the child said not to-15

G. Didn't know-35

The findings of this part of the study indicate that more than half of the parents surveyed had in fact seen commercials or had read articles about the importance of reading aloud to children. 79 parents indicated that they had received literature

sent home from school on this topic, and yet this particular school did not really send that much information on this subject home to the parents. Approximately three years ago the school did hold a parent in-service and one of the topics for this in-service was the benefits of reading aloud to children. Perhaps this had a strong impact on the parents.

As a result of exposure to the media, 38 parents began to read to their children, and 86 parents were encouraged to share reading with their children. Many of the parents in this school, (51) felt that once their child learns to read for him/herself, they can stop reading aloud to the child. This would suggest that the media should place more emphasis on the benefits of reading aloud even to older children.

The form of media that had the most impact on parents was television, with magazines running second, and the newspaper being the least effective.

Media Effects on Teachers

The second part of this research had to do with teachers and the effect that the media has had on their attitudes on reading aloud to their students. Eighteen teacher surveys were returned. All 17 of the teachers responded that they did read aloud to their classes. Thirteen teachers indicated that they read aloud every day, 4 read aloud occasionally, and 1 teacher indicated that she read aloud once a week.

The teachers were asked if the media had any effect on their decision to read aloud to their students, and 16 teachers

responded that the media had no effect on their decision to read aloud while 2 said it had.

When asked at what grade level teachers should stop reading aloud to students, 16 responded Never, and 2 teachers said 8th grade was when reading aloud should stop. Another question which elicited a variety of responses was what factors influenced them to read aloud to their students. Some of them said that they read aloud to increase vocabulary, improve listening skills, the students enjoy it, it helps the class to relax, college courses encouraged it, and a few of them stated that their own parents and teachers had read to them and it had a lasting, positive effect.

Fifteen teachers stated that they had stressed the importance of parents reading aloud to their children at home, but 3 stated that they had never done so. The consensus among the teachers was that the schools should have workshops for parents so that they are made aware of the lasting benefits of reading aloud to their children. A few teachers indicated that book lists should be sent home to parents.

CONCLUSIONS

The media had played an important role in the promulgation of reading aloud by parents to their children, according to this study. Parents are very aware of its importance, and seem to realize that they should be investing significant time each day to this act. Television has been a major persuasive factor, along with magazine articles.

Teachers on the other hand, have not been influenced or

persuaded by the media to read aloud to their classes. According to this study, if teachers enter a classroom and do not believe that reading aloud for fifteen minutes per day to their students is important, the media has been ineffective in changing their attitudes and behavior. Therefore, undergraduate schools must be convincing and persuasive in getting the message across to future classroom teachers, that reading aloud daily for fifteen minutes can have lasting, positive effects on their students.

Principals should also stress to their teachers the importance of making reading aloud an integral part of the daily curriculum. Perhaps educators should be addressing this problem in workshops for teachers.

The media has been effective for parents, but it certainly seems to have failed to reach a very important population - classroom teachers.

RELATED RESEARCH

Mothers have been told time and time again to read to their children, and begin it at an early age. As far back as the 1930's, the children's literature anthologist May L. Becker claimed that love of reading was instilled by the recitation of nursery rhymes at the cradle (Resnick, 1987). In 1944, Annis Duff, the author of Bequest of Wings: A Family's Pleasures with Books, felt that her children had a love for books because they had been read to from infancy. In the 1950's, Nancy Larrick's book, "A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading" (1958) recommended many books that were appropriate for babies under a year old.

And yet it wasn't until the 1960's that there was actual research to prove what many experts were telling the public to do. Dolores Durkin conducted a study of early readers and presented scientific evidence which indicated that reading readiness in children was associated with their having been read to as preschoolers.

A number of researchers have found a positive correlation between being read to at home and the level of language development of young children (Chomsky, 1972). Moreover, early readers are almost all read to by their parents or someone else in the home (Durkin, 1966). In another study, a group of students who had learned to read at age four, while participating in a preschool language arts program were exposed to a program of reading aloud, the development of a small sight vocabulary, and letter and numeral naming (Durkin, 1974). Reading achievement scores for these children during grades one and two exceeded those of the control group with a difference significant beyond the .05

level.

In Chomsky's study, (1972), it was found that hearing books read, and reading books, was a strong factor in the linguistic stage of development at all ages. Prereaders in high linguistic stages heard more books each week, were read to by more people, and heard books at higher complexity levels than prereaders at lower linguistic stages.

Cousert (Altwerger,1985) found that the most powerful influence on children's success in elementary school was the amount of time they saw their parents reading. Parents become a visual model for their children to imitate (Smith,1988). Research has regularly shown the value of reading aloud to children-the parent demonstrates with visual impact that she/he is interested in reading and in the books that have value for the child.

In convincing parents of reading aloud's importance, two objections must be answered. The first is "How is this going to help my child's reading if I'm doing the reading?' The second objection is "Why should you read to a child who already knows how to read?" Another question to consider is when do you stop reading aloud to children?

Trelease answers these objections with a simple explanation: Listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. If a child is not exposed to the word auditorally he/she will never say the word. And if you have never heard it or said it, it stands to reason you will not likely be able to read it or write it (1989).

Many children have a listening level that is many grades higher than their reading level. My own second grade classes have always enjoyed hearing Charlotte's Web (White, 1952), which is geared to the reading level of fourth graders. It is not until around eighth grade that reading and listening levels converge, and then only for the student reading on grade level. For the remedial reader, listening level remains ahead of reading level (Trelease, 1989).

Reading aloud to young children can also affect their reading interests. Mason and Blanton (1971) conducted a study to determine appropriate story content for beginning reading instruction, reading interests and literature preferences of three, four and five year-old children. The children were pre-readers, so the stories were read aloud to them. One important finding of the study was that after the children learned to read, they were more eager to read for themselves the books which had been read to them, than to read other books (McCormick, 1977).

The amount and complexity of material read by a group of children and read aloud to a group of children ages six through ten in relation to their linguistic development were also studied by Chomsky (1972). She states that "The written language is potentially of a more complex nature than speech, both in vocabulary and syntax. The child who reads or listens to a variety of rich and complex materials benefits from a range of linguistic inputs that is unavailable to the non-literary child.

unavailable to the non-literary child".

Parents of children who are successful in reading actually discussed their own reading and the books that their children read in school and at home. The parents showed a personal interest in the intellectual life of their children, especially as it related to books. Melton found that parents wanted to know what their children were learning or enjoying from books as much as they wanted children to know that they likewise got pleasure and information from the things that they read (Smith, 1988).

For the parents that are aware that reading aloud is a vital part of their child's education, there is also the problem of reading aloud to infants and young children when it can be a frustrating experience. Tiny babies do not appear interested in the stories, six month olds are eating the books, and the babies that are twelve to eighteen months won't sit still, but would rather get down off the lap and crawl around on the floor. After conducting a study on thirteen mothers reading to their infants, Lamme and Packer (1986) found that the book reading was not only a positive experience, but an educational one as well.

The thirteen mothers were videotaped reading to their infants, and Lamme noted that the mothers adjusted their book reading behavior to the developmental levels of their infants. The youngest babies in the study (from birth to about 3 months) simply stared at the book. There appeared to be no connection between the infant's gaze and what the parent was reading or talking about.

At about five months, the infants began following their

parent's pointing cues. If the infant looked at a picture, the parent would then point and talk about what the child was focused on, but most of the time the parent would initiate the verbal exchange by pointing to a particular picture, and then the infant would look to where the parent directed.

When the babies were a little older (nine months to a year) the babies would look at the designated picture (which matched the adults reading a discourse) without the parental pointing cue. At this stage the babies all looked for longer periods of time, at the colorful illustrations and books that they were familiar with.

Lamme observed that when younger infants looked away from the book (without the distractions of a noise or something else) then avoidance behavior usually indicated the end of that book sharing experience. If the parent stopped reading at that point, the session ended happily, but if the parent pressed on in an effort to finish reading the book, the baby would react adversely by crying, and therefore this book sharing experience ended on a sad and frustrating note.

Cueing into the baby's visual behaviors then, becomes an especially good way for parents to determine when the baby is involved in the book reading or has had enough (Lamme, 1986).

Part of the tactile behavior that was observed in this study was the fact that if parents pointed a lot as they read, by one year of age the babies would also point and the parents responded by naming whatever the child pointed at. Many infants could also turn one page at a time of a

familiar story, especially if the book had thick cardboard pages.

A number of factors seem to influence the way an infant responds to a book reading episode. Lamme states that those factors include the familiarity of the book, the time of day, the setting or location of the reading, the infant's level of energy or fatigue, the type of book being read, the size of the book, the child's previous exposure to storyreading, and the person reading with them, be it father, mother, sibling or friend.

Lamme states that when babies are very young, it's important to observe their visual responses to book reading and to end sessions quickly when the baby starts to lose interest. When children begin to pat and grab the books, they should have the heavier cardboard books so that the books will hold up. Older infants like to be actively involved in the storybook reading. They don't enjoy being read to as much as they enjoy being actively involved in the reading experience.

When parents are aware of the typical behavior patterns that are part of the normal development of infants, they will be able to proceed on course with reading aloud to their infants, but knowing when to put down the book, before it turns into an ordeal for the child. Parents must be made aware that they should be paying more attention to their child than to the text of the book. Lamme found that it was obvious that the infants who have been read to routinely greatly enjoy that experience and have learned a great deal about books, reading and language from their book reading

experiences.

Most of the research which has been conducted on the topic of reading aloud to children is correlational in design; the main concern has generally been with measuring the context to which reading to children is associated with their development in language and literacy (Teale, 1981). The studies by Chomsky, Durkin, Teale and other noted researchers in the field have told us that those children who are above average in the preceding aspects of language and literacy development. Teale states that we must also recognize the limitations of knowledge based solely on the significance of reading to children.

Correlational results indicate only that there is a link between being read to and success in certain general competencies in language and literacy; they give little insight into specific consequences of reading to children, and they do not address the important theoretical and practical issues of how it is that these competencies develop as a result of the book reading events (Teale, 1981). We must also investigate what experiences in reading aloud does for children, and how and why it does what it does.

Smith and Clay argue that by being read to, a child learns that print is meaningful, that print can be turned into sound, and that written language is different from oral language. They also have observed that in these reading events, the child learns certain features of written language (as evidenced by his/her ability to mimic the lexicon and structure typical of written language). The work

of Smith and Clay help in characterizing the consequences of reading to children; however neither author has examined in detail the interaction between parent and child which help develop these understandings (Teale, 1981).

Holdaway has researched "the environment, the practices and outcomes of story reading and book handling in the home where these play a significant part in child rearing", (1979). This study actually focused on children's independent re-enactments of stories which they had heard read to them several times. This study reveals that after adults read to children, they then practice reading-like behavior which helps them come to grips with the structures and meanings of written language. Holdaway's results suggest that storybook reading events in these homes were both enjoyable and interesting for the children, and ones from which the children were able to derive processes useful for reading, processes which they practiced in their independent re-enactments of the stories (Teale, 1981).

Flood (1977) has investigated the relationship between "parental style" in reading and the child's performance on certain pre-reading related tasks. He identified fourteen "components of the parent-child reading episode" and found 1) total number of words spoken by child, 2) number of questions answered by child, 3) number of task-related questions asked by child, 4) warm-up questions asked by parent, and 5) post-story evaluative questions asked by parent to be of importance. He concluded that reading style which results in the most benefits for a child is one in which there is verbal interaction between parents and child

(Teale, 1981).

Detailed descriptions of storybook reading events are necessary for they provide sources of information from which we can draw conclusions about the nature of activity which seems to further children's literacy development. Teale feel s that an endeavor which should be a high priority in reading education research is developing a theory of how individuals in the home and school environments might best help the child who is learning to read and write. Smith (1973) has said that the dynamics of the approach should be to "respond to what the child is trying to do".

Teale feels that an important point is an understanding of the nature of variation in the literacy orientation with which children come to our schools. Basically we teach reading and writing as if all children share similar experiences of literacy development. However, research indicates that this is not necessarily so. Insight gained into children's literacy orientations through analyses of how children are read to may help with educating schools in how to provide reading and writing instruction which builds upon the foundation a child brings to school as a result of his or her sociocultural experiences (Teale, 1981).

Flood (1977) investigated parental styles in reading aloud to their young children and concluded that if a parent talks with a child while reading aloud, it will help the child to enjoy and understand the story. Guinagh and Jester (1972) also emphasized the importance of the quality of parents' reading aloud to their children. They stressed that the interaction between a parent and a child must be

positive, if oral reading episodes are to develop positive attitudes toward books and reading.

Studies about the quantity of reading aloud time to young children have shown that relatively little time is spent by parents in this endeavor. The Ginsburg study (Mann, 1984) has revealed that working mothers and homemakers spent an average of one minute a day, including weekends, reading to their children; fathers in homes where the mothers work spent no more than a minute a day reading to children and no time if the mother did not work outside the home.

Manning (1984) conducted a study that investigated the perspectives of parents who do read aloud to their children. Parents were selected through the children's sections of 43 public libraries in a large urban city in the Southeast. The parents had to answer a survey questionnaire that focused on such details as what happened during the oral reading, the amount of print in the home, parents' reading habits, their perceptions of the value of reading aloud to children and their personal experiences with reading aloud when they were children.

This study's findings clearly indicated that parents who have developed the habit of reading aloud to their children are aware of its many values. The study also confirmed that many parents are reading to their children as a result of outside information about the value of that process to their children's learning. Manning feels that such a result should indicate that there is a need in schools to incorporate parent education programs.

Some parents may know how to encourage their children to

read, and some may have learned how to stay actively involved with their children's reading growth in order to promote intellectual development (Smith, 1988). Most parents, however, probably need some explicit guidance and the encouragement of the school in order to know what to do. Allen and Freitag (1988) propose a workshop that schools can offer to parents and students to become cooperative learners; that is, to work together consistently in order to learn by mutual need. Criscuolo (1986) describes activities and communication techniques that can win parental support for quality reading instruction.

Over eighty years ago Huey (1908) emphasized the importance of parents' reading aloud to their children when he wrote "The success of it all lies in the parents' reading aloud to and with the child". Current research certainly supports this theory, as we enter the decade of the nineties.

It would be helpful for parents to be given annual lists of books - differentiating between those they can read to the child and those that can be borrowed and bought to be read by the child (Trelease, 1989). Reading teachers could also make contact with community pediatricians, providing them with all the reasons they should be recommending parents read to their child.

Teale has discovered through his research that the accessibility of printed materials on a wide range of subjects was characteristic of the environment of successful early readers. This availability enabled the children to use and get used to written messages. Durkin (1966) comments on

the "easy availability of materials for children in her California study, and the results from the New Your study indicate that those pre-school readers had access to a range of reading materials, especially storybooks, Golden books and alphabet books. Availability is not determined simply by the number of books owned by a family, but even the use of the local library as a source of reading material for the children.

Printed material to be read aloud does not just have to be books. Durkin (1966) cites the importance of "everyday print" in the children's learning to read. Many children love to be able to identify signs, names on products, words on their clothing, labels on cans, and words found in television commercials. Cookbooks, telephone directories, maps and newspapers are also frequently mentioned as sources of read-aloud materials.

Children come to reading through a variety of printed materials as different as books and street signs. Each individual child has varied interests when they are introduced to reading. An environment which facilitates the child's contacting various types of printed materials on a range of topics does much to take into account the points just mentioned, and thereby makes learning to read a part of the general endeavor of comprehending one's own surroundings (Teale, 1978).

The books, the signs, and the product labels all are potential sources for reading, and comprise a factor which may contribute to a positive environment for learning to read. But the opportunity to learn to read could remain

untapped unless the child learns what print in the environment serve. The child must learn that print is meaningful. Understanding the functions of written language is greatly helped when the variety of printed materials is accompanied by interpretation. Reading and responding to print is the basic way by which children come to understand that print has meaning for them. When a child points to the stop sign, and experiences the car slowing down and coming to a stop, he begins to understand that words can be meaningful to him.

Reading books or stories to children can also help them realize that print has meaning, but reading narrative to children not only familiarizes them with the function of print, but it also begins to help children be aware of the structure and nature of written language.

Teale (1978) states "Written language is not simply a graphic means of depicting speech. The primary difference between oral and written language is that written language is characterized by isolation from a situational context. As a result the two modes of expression differ in vocabulary, syntax, and degree of explicitness, among other things" (p.927).

Children must come to understand the language of books and listening to prose being read aloud is one way of developing this understanding. By listening to the printed word, children can develop a feel for the word patterns, the flow, and the nature of written language. Listening to written stories can help children construct a story grammar, which in turn helps children to comprehend stories when they

are reading themselves.

Durkin (1966) found that all seventy-nine of her subjects were read to by parents and that in the California study thirty-five of the forty-nine were read to by siblings. Of all the facets of the environment mentioned in the studies of early readers, reading aloud to children is probably most cited.

Reading aloud to children was not all that was done in the way of reading in these different studies.Many researchers also found that one or both of the parents of the early readers were readers themselves. Durkin (1966) points out this characteristic in the mothers from her New York study and as she states from her California study "as a group the parents of the forty-nine subjects not only could read but did" (p.48).

We an say that after looking at the various studies that certain factors are present when young children are successful readers, and these are that they come from a print-rich environment which is interpreted for them by various family members. Early readers saw people reading and responding to print, and they themselves were read to and came to understand that reading is another means of communicating in their world. The environment allowed them to discover that reading is a pleasurable, unique, communicative experience (Teale, 1978).

Another factor to consider for successful early readers is that there is contact with paper and pencil. Durkin (1966) characterized the early readers in her New York study as "pencil and paper kids". Many studies of early readers

fail to mention this facet of beginning reading, probably because the design of the research did not include the writing aspect of reading. Some evidence can support the fact that learning to read is reinforced by simultaneous experiences in writing. It might be said that a positive environment for learning to read would include lots of scribbling.

Morrow conducted a study on how children become voluntary readers. The study described the home and school environments and the behaviors of kindergarten children identified as having a high or low interest in literature. Substantial numbers of children do not choose to read either for pleasure or for information. One explanation for the low level of voluntary reading may be that developmental reading programs are often skills-oriented and provide little opportunity for students to read for enjoyment (Lamme, 1976).

Voluntary readers tend to be girls, to come from small, middle- and upper- class families, to have a high level of reading achievement, and to be cardholders at the public libraries (Morrow, 1983). Voluntary readers also come from homes in which there is a supportive "literary environment", as indicated by the availability of books, the amount of reading aloud being done with the child, reading guidance and good role models of voluntary adults reading.

The I.Q. scores of early readers are not consistently high; they range from low-average to well above average. Early readers are able to accomplish Piagetian concrete tasks. They are interested in pencil-and-paper activities.

letters and words. They come from homes where parents read to them, readily give help with writing and reading, and often read themselves (Durkin, 1966).

Past research and present findings suggest that school achievement and high literature interest tend to go together, but early readers and skilled readers are not necessarily recreational readers. A child may have high academic ability as measured by a standardized achievement test, and yet if literature is not stressed at home or school this child may not show an interest in books or develop into a recreational reader (Morrow, 1983).

Classrooms where literature programs were rated as good or excellent, and where teachers stressed regular planned literature activities resulted in 81% of the high-interest children (Morrow, 1983). These classrooms had teachers who provided space for well-designed library corners. Eighty-two percent of the low-interest children in this study came from classrooms where the literature environments had been rated as fair or poor.

Morrow feels there should be further research done investigating the home and school environment and behavior of children having high or low interest in literature. Reading programs are so skills-oriented that they provide little opportunity for students to do recreational reading.

The study was successful in developing a composite measure to identify kindergarten children who have high or low interest in literature. It has already been documented that reading habits develop early, the observational techniques described in this study can be useful for

studying this early development (Morrow, 1983). "The classroom teacher can identify children demonstrating low interest in books and then provide literature-related activities to stimulate these children's interests. The parents of these children should be encouraged to incorporate literature activities into the home to help develop their child's interest in books" (p.227).

It is indicated from the results of this study that the home has the strongest influence on a child's interest in literature from when they are very young. The findings of the study also reveal that there are similarities between the home behaviors and environments of older voluntary readers, early readers, and young children who exhibit an interest in literature. All of the groups come from home literary environments and use the public library. The early readers and children interested in literature demonstrated similar play interests, such as paper and crayon activities. The early readers were also read to frequently.

This study found that rules regarding television viewing are more prevalent in the high-interest group. All parents reported reading some types of reading materials but reading novels and magazines was particular to the high-interest parents. Working and non-working mothers had no affect in interest in books. The mothers of low-interest children watched more television than those in the high-interest group. The placement of books in many rooms of the home, especially in the child's bedroom and in the kitchen, was characteristic of high-interest children/

Teachers can play an important role in stimulating

voluntary reading in children. According to the results of this study, teachers need support from the student' home environments to succeed in this role. It seems important to establish early cooperative efforts between home and school to create a systematic, integrated program for developing recreational readers (Morrow, 1983).

When teachers do try to create a good, literary environment in their classrooms, they are given suggestions to make the reading performance successful. Lamme created an instrument to measure how well a teacher is reading aloud to a group of children. In her study (Lamme, 1976) videotaped 63 teachers of pre-school, kindergarten, first and second grades while reading aloud a picture storybook to the children in their classes. Each read aloud session was analyzed by two coders using a preliminary form of a Reading Aloud to Children Scale (RACS).

Lamme concluded that child involvement in the story reading was the most influential item on the scale. The teachers who read the story aloud while the children had to sit quietly with no verbal involvement, scored lower on the RACS as a whole than did teachers who actively involved children in the story reading. Teachers had children chorally "read" the refrains, or make predictions, or fill in words from time to time.

The second most important read aloud behavior was the amount of eye contact between the reader and the children. Teachers who have to read the text word for word did not score as well as those teachers who look up from the text and make eye contact with the children.

Lamme's study suggests another good characteristic of good oral reading was using good expression, rather than reading in a monotonous tone.

Another factor which contributed favorably to the overall RACS score was when the teacher pointed to words and pictures as she was reading. Selection of the book, particularly with regard to quality of the illustrations proved to be important. When the teachers selected picture books that were large enough for the group of children to view without difficulty, and were appealing enough to hold their interest or elicit comments, scored highest on the RACS.

An important item for teachers to take into consideration when reading aloud to a class or group of children was highlighting the words and language of the story. If stories have rhyming words, they should be made obvious to the children. Teachers should discuss or clarify an unusual vocabulary word. When there is repetition, it should be emphasized. Awareness of these language factors separate the good read aloud teacher from the poor one.

Although there are no definite research answers to the relationships between teachers oral reading performances and children's' learning of prereading skills and beginning reading skills, it seems obvious that, at the least, children's attitudes toward literature are influenced by the ways in which adults react and respond to the reading material (Lamme, 1976).

Research suggests still other important reasons for teachers to be reading aloud to their students as an

integral part of the daily curriculum. For economically disadvantaged children in grades one and two, and in grades four through six, investigation of the effects of reading aloud to children on a regular basis have shown significant increases in quantity of vocabulary growth, knowledge of word meanings, visual decoding, motor encoding, and reading comprehension achievement (McCormick, 1977).

Reading aloud to children in elementary school grades from low income homes, and to children who are low achievers seems to aid vocabulary development and reading achievement. The regularity of hearing stories read and the duration of the treatment seem to be factors related to reading growth. Hearing stories read can also affect first grade reading achievement and can also affect later reading interests. Language development and hearing stories read aloud have been shown to be related, as have the syntactic complexity of the stories listened to or read and the stage of linguistic development. Listening to books read aloud may be an aid in readiness for coping with literary language better than oral discussion (McCormick 77).

Teachers read to children for a variety of reasons. Many teachers who read aloud have a deep love for books themselves-and want their students to learn to feel the same way. Some teachers read aloud because they want to read for themselves. Unfortunately, some educators have not realized the value of reading aloud and have failed to provide students a time slot in which they can hear good literature. Reading aloud has sometimes been relegated to be used to "fill in."

"In this age of accountability, time spent reading to children can be justified since the activity does promote measurable growth in achievement. At the same time, when children hear literature read, we are satisfying the goals of educators who value the equally important aesthetic and subjective reasons for reading aloud to children" (McCormick 77, p 143).

Studies have also been conducted concerning reading interests. Butler cites a study which found that reading aloud to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders affected their reading interests as well as their comprehension (1980, p883). The New York Public Library has conducted surveys in conjunction with their reading aloud programs. Reluctant readers attending these sessions have a new enthusiasm which is noted by their teachers and statistics substantiated by the books the students check out (Butler, 1980).

The classroom teacher should provide the experience of reading a good book which is on a level beyond the children's ability, whether it is for the beginning reader or the older student, for the disabled reader or the competent student. Whether the pupil is an elementary or secondary student, access to content beyond his or her current reading ability is a stimulus to continued reading progress (Butler 1980).

"Reading aloud is the most influential advertisement for the pleasures of reading" (Trelease 1989, p 201). An example of how this concept works is reflected in the research done by Martinez and Teale, 1988. During an eight week period, researcher observed a kindergarten class that

had a good classroom library and whose teacher read aloud every day. There were three kinds of library books: very familiar (read repeatedly by the teacher, familiar (read once, and unfamiliar (unread). In observing which books were chosen during their free time, the researchers found that children chose the very familiar books three times as often and familiar books twice as often as the unfamiliar books. The children who were nonreaders modeled the teacher when choosing the very familiar and familiar books and pretended they were reading them aloud. The kindergarten teacher had modeled the way for reading, and in so doing, she inspired her students to try this magic called reading (Trelease 1989).

Trelease has said, "Reading is an accrued skill: The more you do it the better you get at it; and the more you do it the more you like it (1989, p 202). This is exemplified by Samuel's theory theory of automaticity in reading. If children don't read much, they can't get much better at it. Research indicates today's potential young readers don't read much in school (Goodlad, 1984) or out of school. Reading aloud works directly on converting negative reading attitudes to positive ones (Trelease, 1989).

Reading aloud to students can be considered a stake in the future of America. The student who never sees or hears an adult reading aloud for pleasure is unlikely to grow up and read to children. Reading aloud to students, however, improves the chances the listener will someday read his or her child and this strengthens the possibilities of future education being a true partnership between the

parent-teacher and the classroom teacher (Trelease, 1989).

Trelease (1989, p.200) says, "Teaching children how to read is not enough, we must also teach them to want to read. We have produced a nation of schooltime readers where the objective should be lifetime readers. But if the school reading experience is so life-leeched that the student never reads outside of class and, worse, solemnly swears on graduation day never to read another book, the system has failed".

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APPENDIX A

PARENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How many children do you have? Please list ages and grade levels of each child.

2. Have you ever read aloud to your children?

3. If answer #2 was yes, please circle how often.

   A. Once a week.

   B. Once every two weeks.

   C. Once a month.

   D. Occasionally

   E. Every day.

4. If answer #2 was yes, state why you read to your child/children.

5. How old was your child when you began to read to him/her?

6. Has anyone or anything influenced you to read aloud to your child/children?

7. Have you seen commercials or read articles on the importance of reading aloud to children?

8. If #7 was yes, please circle what type of advertising.

   A. Television

   B. Magazine articles

   C. Newspaper articles

   D. Literature sent home from the school

9. Did the advertising you saw (check all that apply)

   A. cause you to begin reading to your child/children?

   B. make you feel guilty that you had not read to your child/children?

   C. confirm your views about reading to children?

   D. have no effect on the amount of time spent reading to your child/children?

   E. encourage you to share your reading with your child/children?

   F. encourage you to get a library card?

   G. encourage you to attend a library reading class?

10. Do you enjoy reading?

11. Do your children ever see adults in the house reading:

    A. Once a week?

    B. Once every two weeks?

    C. Once a month?

    D. Occasionally?

    E. Every day?

12. Do you think reading aloud to children is important?

13. At what age would you stop reading aloud to your children?

APPENDIX B

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What grade level/content area do you teach?

2. Do you read aloud to your class?

3. If #2 was yes, how often?

   A. Once a week

   B. Once every two weeks

   C. Once a month

   D. Occasionally

   E. Everyday

4. Do you think reading aloud to students increases their vocabularies and improves reading comprehension?

5. At what grade level should teachers stop reading to their students?

6. If you read to your students, what types of literature do you use? Please circle whatever is applicable.

   A. Novels

   B. Short stories

   C. Poetry

   D. Picture story books

   E. Other

7. Do you enjoy reading?

8. What factors have influenced you to read aloud to your students?

9. Has the media had any effect on your decision to read aloud to your class? If so, in what way?

10. What could the school do to encourage more parents to read aloud to their children?

11. Have you ever stressed the importance of parents reading aloud to their children?